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ABSTRACT

Although not intended as a step-by-step guide for developing a communication assessment program, this paper shows how one department, the Department of Communication and Theater at Youngstown State University, began the process of assessing its program. The paper points out that the difficulty in assessment is that each program is different and that the idiosyncratic elements on each campus force the modification of plans because of political realities. Sections of the paper discuss general principles of assessment, directions in communication assessment, the translation of assessment suggestions in the department, the development of department goals and objectives, the development of goals and objectives for the communication studies area, the development of student outcomes, and the starting points for the development of the framework of the assessment program. Although organizations such as the Speech Communication Association, regional accrediting agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education are beginning to produce materials on communication assessment, the paper concludes that the best sources of help and timely information are colleagues in other communication programs who have experience in developing and using assessment plans. Contains 45 references. Appendixes present university mission statements, department goals, speech communication area goals, and student outcomes. (RS)

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ASSESSMENT FROM THE BEGINNING -- SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING: A CASE STUDY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND THEATER AT YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to examine where to begin a communication assessment program and is not intended to be the direct step-by-step guide for developing a communication assessment program. Rather, it is intended to show how one department, the Department of Communication and Theater at Youngstown State University, began this process. Since this paper was proposed for the convention, the faculty in the department have made tremendous strides towards the development and implementation of an assessment program. This paper summarizes these efforts. The author would be glad to respond to queries regarding what we have experienced at Youngstown State University.

Although we are beginning to see more and more materials from the Speech Communication Association, our regional accrediting agencies, and the U.S. Department of Education on communication assessment; this paper suggests at the end that the best sources of helpful and, perhaps, timely information are our colleagues in other communication programs who have experience in developing and using assessment plans. For those of you who are in the initial phases of developing communication assessment programs, find these materials -- they are helpful guides. The difficulty in assessment development is that each program is different and each university or college is different. The idiosyncratic elements on each of our campuses force us to modify plans and placate political realities.

The paper summarizes some of the literature on communication assessment and then attempts to identify common themes espoused by scholars who study assessment. The paper then progresses through a sequence of events leading to the creation of an assessment plan for the Department of Communication and Theater at Youngstown State University.

Assessment from the Beginning--Something Out of Nothing:
A Case Study of the Department of Communication and Theater
at Youngstown State University

Communication departments across the United States face the task of assessing student and program outcomes. One primary impetus for this emphasis on assessment in higher education is provided by each of the regional accrediting associations. They each place increasing emphasis on the importance of student communication education and skill development as part of or in addition to a strong general education program. Let's see what each of the associations says about the role of communication skill training for students as part of a university's life-blood.

> *"If a general education program is based on cognitive experiences, it will typically describe its program in terms of the college-level experiences that engender such competencies as: capabilities in reading, writing, speaking, listening" (p. 21).*
>
> - **North Central Association of Colleges and Schools**

> *"General education introduces students to the content and methodology of the major areas of knowledge -- the humanities, the fine arts, the natural sciences -- and helps them to develop the mental skills that will make them more effective learners. . . .*

Programs of study ... must contain a recognizable body of instruction in program-related areas of 1) communication, 2) computation, and 3) human relations" (p. 57).

- Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges

"Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; ..." (p. 12).

- New England Association of Schools and Colleges

"Within this core [of general education courses], or in addition to it, the institution ***must*** *provide components designed to ensure competence in reading, writing, oral communication and fundamental mathematical skills" (p. 24).*

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

"Programs and courses which develop general intellectual skills such as the ability to form independent judgment, to weigh values, to understand fundamental theory, and to interact effectively in a culturally diverse world" (p. 4).

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

Given these statements, communication faculty need to develop useful and appropriate ways of assessing their programs, their instruction and their students communication skills and knowledge to demonstrate the effectiveness of communication skill development programs. Where is one to start on the assessment voyage? How should we avoid the pitfalls of other programs seeking to develop communication assessment programs? Can we turn to the Speech Communication Association for guidance in these areas? Perhaps we should turn to the professionals who have been working with the issues of assessment in higher education for some time.

Assessment in General - Principles

The American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum (1992) provides those of us developing an assessment program with nine general guidelines. The Association calls these principles a "wisdom of practice" for assessment (p. 1). These principles are:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public (pp. 2-3).

Given the fact that much of the dialogue on campuses that initiates the need to develop assessment programs is top-down communication, the faculty who have to put together program-specific assessment face the final challenges of development and execution. These nine principles provide a loose framework for communication faculty to develop appropriate and useful assessment programs. Let's briefly discuss this framework for the beginning of an assessment development program in communication.

For any assessment program the overriding goal must be to improve the

education of our students. The same is true for assessment in communication programs -- whether the assessment is in the beginning (basic) communication course, in the undergraduate degree program, or in our graduate programs. Evaluation of outcomes solely should not be the goal of the development of the assessment program. Assessment should be the means to improved instruction -- period. Outcomes assessment in communication should be an ongoing process that examines student performance over a period of time. This is easier to accomplish in graduate and undergraduate degree programs. However, this kind of assessment is more difficult when trying to assess outcomes, lets say, in the beginning communication course. Since students in the beginning course are available for only one term (a semester or a quarter) it is difficult to development an ongoing assessment program of student skill development beyond the grading policies and systems already in place. Grading is a form of performance assessment; but also has many potential pitfalls. First, there are issues related to the standardized application of whatever standards used in a particular course. Second, when a student receives an "A" in the basic communication performance course, a form of assessment, what does this "assessment" communicate to others who see that grade? Third, what is the relationship between the assessment offered by a student's grade in the basic course and the student's competence to communicate?

Another problem that arises in assessing students is the students willingness to participate in the assessment process. Johnson, et al. (1993) write, "Even students object to requests that they spend additional time on assessment activities. And when they comply, they may do so with a form of passive resistance" (p. 152). If we are to include students in the assessment process, and this is not a simple process, we have to incent them to

participate fully in the process. The incentives used need to be determined at the department level and supported by the administration (especially if there is a financial burden to be assumed in the inventive process). This is especially if departments require students to take a standardized test of some type near the end of their studies. For example, one program has graduating students take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). One of the issues this program faced was who was going to pay the fees necessary for students to register for and take the test. [There are other issues related to this type of assessment that we will not discuss in this paper.] In addition, there are other knowledge assessment programs used currently at some institutions in the basic communication course; for example, the Personalized System of Instruction at the University of Nebraska. Obviously, we also test our students on their knowledge of communication concepts and theories in our upper division courses.

In developing a communication assessment plan, it is important that we know exactly what we are to be assessing. This means we have to agree, at least at the department level what communication skills, theories and practices are important to include in the assessment plan. In our discipline, there is substantial disagreement about just exactly what these things are. Within individual departments, communication educators cannot agree on what skills or knowledge are important for students. For example, in the beginning communication course we have multiple approaches -- public speaking, hybrid, interpersonal, group, communication or rhetorical theory, etc. At the upper division undergraduate level, is it important students learn statistics, rhetorical criticism, empirical research? All of them? None of them? Some of them -- but which ones? To what degree? At the graduate level, there is

the ongoing debate in departments about the relative emphasis to be placed on qualitative versus quantitative research or vice versa. I say this in light of the observation of the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) in their report *A Preliminary Study of the Feasibility and Utility for National Policy of Instructional "Good Practice" Indicators in Undergraduate Education* (1994) on communication instruction. The report indicates:

> Definitional complexities of this kind are far fewer for the domain of communications. Most commentators, however, recognize several distinct dimensions of this ability, including being able to receive information as well as simply transmit it (e.g., reading and listening skills) and a distinction between formal and group-oriented (interpersonal) communication (Jones, 1993b). As in the case of critical thinking, most also add judgmental and dispositional qualities to purely technical capacities by including such attributes as a sense of audience or the ability to shift communications strategies to match the needs of changing contexts (Daly, 1992) (p. 5).

This highlights, in my opinion, a seminal problem for faculty attempting to develop assessment in communication. This problem falls in the schism over whether to teach communication as a process or to teach communication as context-bound. This is an important debate; one not to be carried on in this paper.

A second consideration in developing a communication assessment plan is

the commitment of the faculty to such a program. Johnson, et al. (1993) report, "Many faculty members see assessment as a diversion from their traditional roles as teachers and researchers and are concerned that the academic reward structure may not adequately recognize assessment-related efforts. Others simple feel too overloaded to take on more work" (p. 152). Without the commitment of all the faculty to an assessment plan, it will be difficult to administer and even more difficult to use the results of an assessment program to improve the educational experience of students. The advantages of participating in the assessment program for faculty involvement are clear. Black highlights what is, in my opinion, the greatest reward of an assessment program -- improved student learning. Black (1993) writes, "Once the faculty began looking at student course products in portfolios, its understanding of student learning increased tremendously" (p. 143). Johnson, et al. (1993) reiterate this important benefit in stating, "As those people assessing majors [faculty] became more involved in the program evaluation process, many develop a great appreciation for student projects, papers, demonstrations, and other types of performance appraisal techniques" (p. 157).

A final constraint assessment programs in communication face is the restrictions placed on programs by shrinking budgets. If there needs to be an infusion of monies to establish a reliable and valid assessment program within a department, where will the monies come from to do this? In the days of ever-shrinking budgets and the general administrative philosophy that faculty and departments need to do more with less, assessment programs face a harsh reality. This reality is:

Will our assessment plan be put into place for the right reasons -- to better the education of students?

Or, will our assessment plan be put into place to meet the minimum requirements from the administration as they prepare for a regional accrediting agency's regular or follow up visit?

The budget issues continue even with a successful assessment plan in place. As we develop programs of assessment for our programs, we have to wonder if there will be monies to support curriculum review, alumni participation, faculty development, instructional innovation, technological enhancement, etc. when assessment points to areas needing enrichment. I am not suggesting, necessarily, that budgetary considerations (constraints) need to drive the assessment process. I guess I am suggesting that in the beginning phases of assessment development, we need to be cognizant of the budgetary issues at our particular institutions.

Assessment in Communication - Directions

In developing an assessment program, it would seem logical that we could turn to the Speech Communication Association for some guidance. But the problem is, there has been little guidance available to communication faculty in developing an assessment program specific to communication until recently. The National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) in *The National Assessment of College Student Learning: Identification of the Skills to Be Taught, Learned, and Assessed* (1994b), included a set of seven communication competencies for assessment. These competencies are: situational appropriateness, involvement and responsiveness, adaptability and flexibility, clarity, efficiency, goal accomplishment, and politeness. I am

including the Center's descriptions of these competencies for clarity purposes. The Center suggests:

> Every communicator must demonstrate:
>
> A. Situational appropriateness: In every interaction, every speech, every meeting there are certain behaviors that are less appropriate than others. A skilled communicator can "read" the situation, know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, and behave accordingly.
>
> B. Involvement and responsiveness: Effective communication requires, under most circumstances, that every participant be involved and responsive. Involvement and responsiveness are partly nonverbal activities and partly verbal.
>
> C. Adaptability and flexibility: Good communicators adapt to other interactants, demands of the setting, and changing contingencies in the interaction. They are flexible in approaching interaction problems.
>
> D. Clarity: Under most circumstances (when ambiguity and equivocation [see Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett 1990] are not strategic), good communicators are clear in communicating their messages. Not only are messages understandable in terms of language and delivery, but they are clear in terms of intent.

E. Efficiency: Good communicators are efficient in communicating their messages (Kellerman, et al. 1991). They don't waste the time and efforts of others or themselves on unnecessary moves, useless exercises, and tedious verbiage.

F. Goal Accomplishment: Effective communicators, in purposeful interactions, know what they want to accomplish and go about attempting to accomplish that goal. Obviously, goal accomplishment interacts with all the components in this section. Selecting an appropriate goal within a context and performing the appropriate behaviors appropriately are key notions. Indeed, one respondent to this paper (Friedrich) notes that a potentially useful definition of communication would be one couched within goal selection: "A rough preliminary definition might define communication competence as a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performances."

G. Politeness: There are face-saving rules (Brown and Levinson 1987) in any interaction that must be maintained. An effective interactant understands these rules and engages in them as appropriate.

> When the different criteria are closely examined, one could easily argue that there are two major continua most communication events might be judged upon in a rating situation: effectiveness and appropriateness. All six of the criteria described above fit into these two very basic dimensions. Under the rubric of effectiveness would be such variables as clarity, memorability, impact, coherence, and efficiency. Under the label of appropriateness are terms such as adaptability, flexibility, relevance, and awareness of social norms (pp. 132-133).

These competencies offer a direction for faculty working to develop an assessment plan for communication programs. There could be (and maybe should be) debate over the list or their descriptions. However, let's assume for a moment we use these competencies as a basis for developing an assessment plan -- and ignore the temptation to quibble over them (for the moment). These competencies are seemingly appropriate only for communication skill building courses (public speaking, argumentation, group, interpersonal, etc.). There is a large area of our discipline missing in this discussion of assessment -- the content of the communication discipline. Regardless of the debate being carried on in recent issues of SPECTRA (July 1995, September 1995, & October 1995), the communication discipline has a body of knowledge used as a foundation for our pedagogy and for human communication practice. These content areas need to be included in any assessment plan.

In a third report developed by the National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education) entitled, *National Assessment of*

College Student Learning: Identifying College Graduates' Essential Skills in Writing, Speech and Listening, and Critical Thinking (1995), four areas are proposed for a communication assessment plan. The Report continues, "The four major categories are basic speech communication skills, communication codes, oral message evaluation, and human relations" (p. 12). In summarizing the data on communication codes, the Report states:

> From a total of nine skills in this section [communication codes], the respondents initially agree on the importance of six abilities. The most important skill was the use of pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the designated audience. The next two skills were rated equally important by the respondents. College graduates should use appropriate vocal behaviors for the message and audience. They should also speak publicly or in conversational settings without displaying extreme anxiety nervousness. The remaining skills rates as important were using visual or other aids effectively to support ideas, motivate and persuade others along with focusing without fear on the message, and adapting to changes in the setting. ... In summary, after two rounds of surveys, the respondent groups agreed about the importance of using and understanding both spoken English and nonverbal signs or cues as well. The most important skill in this section was the use of pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the designated audience. The lowest-ranked skill,

although still considered important, was the ability to adapt to changes in the setting (pp. 107-108).

Even though the section on "communication codes" is separated from the communication skills section, the final results clearly suggest that this area of assessment is also communication skill-oriented. I must reiterate my concern over the development of an assessment plan in communication with an exclusive or heavy emphasis on communication skills at the expense of including the knowledge base of our discipline. From the perspective of a director of a basic communication course, I would not consider developing an assessment plan that failed to incorporate the knowledge we teach in the basic course. If we only emphasize communication skill development in the assessment of basic communication instruction, we fail our discipline and out students. In a broader focus, communication programmatic assessment would certainly have to focus on knowledge in any assessment program; we certainly teach much more than communication skills in our undergraduate and, obviously, in our graduate communication programs.

These guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education are important and can be used as a <u>starting</u> point for the development of a communication assessment program on any college campus. However, until recently, there has been little direction offered by our parent organization, the Speech Communication Association (SCA), related to a coherent plan to develop communication assessment programs. This is not meant as a criticism -- just a statement of reality. Materials about and attention to developing communication assessment programs have begun to be published and distributed by the Speech Communication Association. In fact, the SCA has put together first, a Committee on Assessment and Testing (CAT) and now has a newly-formed

group, the Commission on Assessment and Testing. (The Commission is a good resource for faculty beginning to develop an assessment program on their campus.)

A more comprehensive effort was coordinated by William G. Christ (1994), under the auspices of the Speech Communication Association, when *Assessing Communication Education: A Handbook for Media, Speech & Theater Educators* was published. This volume includes chapters on assessment, mission statements, regional associations, teaching evaluation, course evaluation, student portfolios, capstone courses, internships & exit interviews, and specific context-specific assessment strategies for public speaking, interpersonal communication, group communication, organizational communication, theatre, and media education. If communication faculty refer to nothing else in working through the developmental phases of communication assessment, this volume should be mandatory reading. Christ (1994) writes in the Preface, "Within this resource handbook, we balance the philosophical implications of accountability with concrete, specific, usable assessment strategies. The aim is to provide, in one place, necessary and vital information that will help a variety of communication educators and programs. ... Our hope is that this book will provide media, speech, and theatre faculty and administrators with the background, understanding, and "tools" to build stronger programs and develop better courses and educational experiences for their students" (p. ix-x). The SCA, the editor, and the authors should be commended for their efforts on putting together this volume as a resource for all of us interested in developing an appropriate and useful communication assessment program on our campuses. No other resource published to date has the compendium of assessment information specifically related to the communication discipline.

Translating Assessment Suggestions to the Department

Currently, the problem for many of us just initiating a program on assessment is the translation of whatever suggestions we have found to meet the particular needs of our institution and department. Historically, the problem has been the fact that there was no pool of resources available to help faculty developing an assessment program. There was no track record of successful, or for that matter unsuccessful, attempts to develop an assessment program for communication departments.

During the 1994 SCA Summer Conference on Assessment in Alexandria, participants heard how other communication programs and faculty handled the development of a communication assessment program on their campus, for their programs, and/or for their individual communication courses. These experiences are a tremendous asset for those of us in the beginning stages of developing an assessment program. Because of the emphasis placed on communication skill development and the requisite assessment that must accompany such a program given all of us by accrediting agencies, we all face the problems of initiating an assessment program that meets two important criteria.

First, the *most* important reason to develop an assessment program is to improve the instruction and learning of our students. Helping faculty become better teachers needs to be the primary motive for an assessment program. Improved teaching will definitely increase the likelihood that students will learn more in specific courses ***and*** over the length of their studies at colleges and universities. Being able to assess student learning and improve

teaching in the classroom must be the overriding goal of any assessment program. The literature is replete with this rationale for developing and using an assessment program -- regardless of institution or academic discipline.

A second important reason to develop a useful assessment program is much more pragmatic than the first. This reason is to meet the needs of our respective accrediting agencies. This is a "politically-correct" reason for developing acceptable assessment plans. [*Notice the shift in terms here from useful to acceptable. Many faculty who have been through developing an assessment plan report that administrators on their campuses, although talking the appropriate talk about the use of assessment, want an assessment program that is acceptable to accrediting agencies.*] Regardless of our noble motives in assessment, practical considerations are important -- if not preeminent. We must devise assessment programs and use the results of those assessments that are acceptable to the accrediting agencies.

With all this in mind, where do we begin? The rest of this paper reports on our efforts in the Department of Communication and Theater at Youngstown State University to develop a communication assessment program that is useful to both students and faculty, but at the same time meets the demands of our accrediting agency (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools). In addition, are also well aware of the time and energy constraints placed on individual faculty members as an assessment plan is implemented.

Assessment: Beginning With University Mission and Goals

To initiate our assessment program at Youngstown State University, the faculty in the Department of Communication and Theater looked to develop goals

and objectives consistent with the University's mission and goals (See Appendix A). If our department's goals and objectives were to help us in the political climate of our institution, we strongly believed that we had to remain within the confines of the overriding mission and goal statements adopted by the university community (December 1993). There are four paragraphs to the University Mission Statement. Below are the first sentences of these paragraphs; which should give the reader a sense of the content areas and emphasis points in the Mission Statement.

1. Youngstown State University strives to create a teaching and learning environment that promotes academic excellence, fosters intellectual growth and scholarship, focuses on the needs of students and the community, and reflects an awareness of cultural and global perspectives and concerns.
2. Youngstown State University aspires to provide an environment in which students can enrich their minds, their creativity, and their problem-solving abilities, so that they may become fully developed individuals, informed, conscientious, and productive citizens; and responsible and understanding partners with others in life, family, and work.
3. The University is committed to fostering an understanding of the connections between and among teaching, scholarship, and service.

4. As a state-assisted metropolitan university, Youngstown State University provides a wide range of opportunities in higher education primarily, but not exclusively, to the residents of northeastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania.

These statements gave the faculty in the Department of Communication and Theater a direction to develop goals and objectives for them that were consistent, or could be argued were consistent, with the mission and goals of the university. Under this mantle, the department faculty began to develop a set of goals and objectives -- all of which would ultimately lead to some kind of programmatic and/or course assessment. There is a direct and strong correlation between the goals and objectives adopted by the faculty in the Department of Communication and Theater and the mission and goal statements adopted by the university community. This was done to facilitate funding requests, program development, and faculty research within the university community.

Developing Department Goals and Objectives

The Department of Communication and Theater consists of three separate, yet interrelated disciplines -- communication studies, telecommunication studies, and theater studies. Although diverse in many interests, the faculty agreed to adopt one set of goals and objectives for the department *before* moving to specific goals and objectives for individual areas. As mentioned above, the faculty wanted to develop goals and objectives consistent with the university mission and goal statements. This is a recommended strategy cited

by Patton and Doherty (1991) in the NCA-CIHE Assessment Workbook.

The department developed and adopted twelve goals for the department in March 1994 (See Appendix B). Once the university community adopted the mission and goal statements, it took our faculty three months to develop and adopt a set of goals for the department. These goals are either clearly or arguably consistent with the goals of the university. Let's take a look at one of the department goals and its relationship with the university mission. University Purpose #2 reflects on the importance of enhancing the quality of the "educational experiences" of students. Department Goal #4 is directly related to this university purpose in that we emphasized "innovative" teaching techniques that reflect current research and technologies. The department goal establishes the foundations to: (1) integrate new instructional technologies into appropriate courses; (2) improve faculty instruction through participation in teacher training programs; and, (3) to support our research efforts in the pedagogy.

The advantages of tieing our goals in teaching with the university's mission and purpose as they relate to teaching are obvious. It has allowed us to request funding for: (1) additional video classrooms for continuing improvement of instruction in our beginning oral performance courses; (2) appropriate learning environments for theater training in directing, acting, scene development and construction, and dance; and, (3) appropriate facilities and equipment for technical instruction in traditional and state-of-the art telecommunications media. We have the support of our dean and provost in these requests for funding needs because they are *closely related to the central mission and purposes* adopted by the university community.

The reader can compare the remaining mission and goal statements of the

university in Appendix A with the remainder of the department goals in Appendix B to assess the correlations hopefully evident.

Specific Development - Communication Studies Area

Since our department, as are many communication departments, is comprised of three separate areas, the next step in developing an assessment program was to develop goals and objectives for the communication studies area (See Appendix C).

Let's continue on the same theme from the illustration above -- teaching and learning as goals and objectives. The first two goals of the communication studies area relate directly to Department Goal #4 and University Purpose #2 on teaching. The faculty in the communication studies area believe it important to improve instruction in all courses. Since we rely heavily on limited service (part-time) faculty to teach our beginning oral performance courses, specifically, we want to help them do a better job in the classroom. Eighty percent of our beginning performance course are taught by part-time faculty. (This is not unlike a goal or objective for a department that relies on graduate teaching assistants [GTAs] to teach their beginning oral performance courses.) The faculty developed two specific areas related to our limited-service faculty: to develop a mentoring program for limited service faculty and initiate an instructional training program for the limited service faculty.

A second area of concern for the communication studies faculty is the dominance of the traditional lecture-discussion teaching format. Many institutions are under increasing pressure to increase class sizes -- to make the faculty more productive (improve faculty/student ratios). The

communication studies area is also experiencing the same pressures. In fact, the provost decreed that the beginning oral performance courses would have 25 students per section. This was an increase of 3 students per section from 1-year ago and an increase of 7 students per section from 4-years ago. Now, this might not sound like too much of an increase to the reader. However, we are on the quarter system (ten weeks of instruction; 4 class hours per week) and are committed to getting the students to perform for a total of 30-35 minutes. This increase in class size has caused us problems in meeting our specific pedagogical goals for these classes. As a result, we adopted a goal of trying to locate and use alternative methods to deliver instructional materials in the class. Since we assume that the time students perform is important, the increased class size is making us look at alternative ways of delivering course content to the students. This goal will not only help us improve instruction (hopefully) but will also enable us to function within the political climate at Youngstown State University.

The third area is to survey alumni to explore the utility of their communication major courses to their jobs or careers. This goal will hopefully assist us in verifying, to some degree, the relevance of our courses to the students *after* graduation. We adopted this goal in the communication studies area with the knowledge that it has been attempted before at other institutions and is fraught with problems, including the rate of return from our alumni. However, we do believe the data received will be an additional source of assessment data in our assessment plan. We will briefly explore our assessment plan later in this paper.

Developing Student Outcomes: A Necessary Step

The final step the communication studies area went through before developing an assessment program was to develop a set of outcomes for our students who went through our undergraduate program in communication (See Appendix D). This was a time consuming and difficult process for the faculty. It took the area approximately a year to arrive at this list of outcomes. There was extensive negotiation resulting from the divergent interests of faculty in the area. Some faculty are rhetoricians and others organizational communication scholars; some are interested in oral performance and others interested in intercultural communication; some are interested in argumentation and others interested in applied communication; some are interested in quantitative research methods and others interested in qualitative research methods. As the reader might be able to relate, the discussions over these, and other areas, were intense and sometimes heated.

Let's take one section of our student outcomes document and explore its relationship with our area's goals and objectives. Quite simply, Area Goal #3 calls for feedback from representatives of organizations in the community regarding the relevance of what we teach with what they believe to be student skills and knowledge upon graduation. The development of this student outcomes document provides us a vehicle to garnish input from local business and government leaders regarding our instructional goals and objectives for the communication studies area. For example, the first student outcome is to have students be able to communicate competently, verbally and nonverbally, in a variety of communication situations. Specifically, we want our graduates to exhibit competence in: (1) listening; (2) working in groups; (3) talking with others with diverse backgrounds; (4) presentational speaking; (5) one-to-one

relationships with others; and (6) in organizational settings. This entire area of the student outcomes document ties directly to the area goals.

In addition, the completed student outcomes document provides us with a clear and specific blueprint for the development of our assessment program.

Assessment Program: A Scenario

Keeping in mind the recommendation from Patton and Doherty (1991) that assessment programs have multiple measures, the faculty in the Communication Studies Area began to develop an assessment program. Taking into account what we had discovered during the SCA Summer Conference on Assessment and what we read about developing assessment programs; keeping in mind the university mission and goal statements, the goals and objectives of the department, the goals and objectives of the area, and the student profile of outcomes the faculty began developing the framework of an assessment program. The overriding conceptual framework for the assessment program was our student profile, or student outcomes, outlined in Appendix D.

After reviewing all the available information, the faculty began to deliberate on designing an assessment program. The faculty devised a two-pronged assessment plan during the Spring of 1995. The first area was in program assessment and the second area was the student outcome assessment.

After hours of meetings, the faculty developed the following areas which were included in program assessment:

1] At the end of each two year cycle, review course offerings.

2] Devise a system for exit interviews to be conducted during the student's last quarter.

3] Development and regular review profile of student outcomes. Profile to contain characteristics of successful graduate of the communication studies program.

4] Alumni survey to determine closeness of fit between what is offered in the courses and what they perceive they need or want in life beyond our institution.

5] Begin placement tracking for graduates in their organizational placements.

These five elements of the program assessment plan are designed to give the faculty feedback regarding the quality of the overall program. There will be data collected from a variety of sources -- current students through exit interviews, graduates through alumni surveys, and faculty as they review course offerings and student outcomes. All of these data will facilitate the ongoing monitoring of the communication studies area in light of the articulated goals and objectives.

The second area of the assessment plan incorporates two documented forms of assessing student outcomes. These include:

1] Capstone course in which students are expected to demonstrate certain characteristics of the student profile.

2] Student portfolio to include student-produced work from several courses; to be used in review of communication studies area faculty no less than annually.

With a focus on student outcomes, the faculty can assess how well the overall instructional package in the communication studies area -- at or near the end of the students' studies. The faculty agreed to review each student's portfolio annually. This will provide a regular monitoring of each student's progress during their undergraduate studies. We are in the midst of discussing a two-course capstone sequence. The first course would teach students research methods and how to develop a literature review and a research proposal on a communication topic. In the second course, the student would complete the project and present it in writing and orally to the faculty and other students in the communication studies program.

Although the details of each of these assessment ideas are being worked out during this academic year, the faculty in the communication studies area and the entire department are convinced we are well on the way to developing an assessment program that exceeds the demands of our accrediting agency (North Central Association of Colleges and Schools). More importantly, however, the faculty believes we are developing a useful tool for the ongoing monitoring of our instruction, our academic program, individual courses, alumni, and our current students.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to highlight starting points for a faculty or department in the beginning stages of developing a communication assessment program. First, it is important to keep the institution's mission and goals in clear focus when developing the department or programs goals and objectives. Once these goals and objectives are completed, assessment

programs can be developed to measure progress towards the accomplishment of those goals and objectives.

As communication educators, we are seeing more useful information forthcoming from the Speech Communication Association to assist us in developing assessment programs. We have also seen relevant information to the development of assessment programs in communication departments provided us by the National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education (the Office of Educational Research and Improvement). However, it seems to me, the most important sources of helpful information are our communication colleagues at colleges and universities across the country. Many of our colleagues have gone through the process of developing and implementing assessment programs on their campuses. There is plenty of useful communication assessment information available from them. Perhaps the best advice we have received from others who have gone through the process already in developing our assessment plan for the communication studies area in the Department of Communication and Theater at Youngstown State University is -- ***KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID!***

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APPENDIX A
UNIVERSITY MISSION STATEMENTS
Youngstown State University [Adopted December 1993]

Purpose 1: Integrate teaching, scholarship and service.

Youngstown State University strives to promote an understanding of teaching, scholarship, and service as inseparable, interactive components of its educational mission.

Objectives:

1. To foster an understanding within and beyond the campus, especially among the public, that teaching, scholarship, and service are fundamentally interrelated and supportive of one another.
2. To encourage, support, and reward faculty who in their professional activity demonstrate the interaction of teaching, scholarship, and service.
3. To help students understand the relationships among what they learn in class, in academic and extracurricular activity beyond the classroom, and in their professional, personal, and societal lives after graduation.
4. To develop opportunities for students both to apply classroom learning in contexts outside the classroom (e.g., internships, co-operative education, public service activities) and to enrich the classroom through knowledge and experiences they bring from outside.

Purpose 2: Teaching and learning.

Youngstown State University endeavors to enhance the quality of the educational experience of its students at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels.

Objectives:

1. To review and strengthen existing programs and selectively develop new undergraduate and graduate programs with a view toward enhancing the quality and diversity of educational offerings, serving the needs of the metropolitan community, and fostering connections within and beyond the University.
2. To encourage activities that chart appropriate directions in existing programs through revitalized curricula and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
3. To continue to update the campus learning environment through technologies, equipment, resources, and facilities to serve the needs of students, faculty, and staff.
4. To offer faculty opportunities for professional development focused on teaching and learning.

Purpose 3: Access and Diversity.

Recognizing its obligations to metropolitan Youngstown and to the world well beyond the region, Youngstown State University aspires to widen the access it provides to people and ideas, striving to create a diverse educational, work, and community environment.

Objectives:

1. To maintain and improve accessibility to University services and programs by continuing to offer a broad range of courses (developmental to honors; certificate, two-year, four-year, and graduate); keeping tuition costs reasonable; enhancing pre-admission, enrollment, and other support services; and developing two-plus-two programs and articulation agreements with other institutions to enable students to move from two-year to four-year programs with little or no loss of credits.
2. To increase retention through enhancement of developmental, tutorial, advisement, dependent-care, adult-learner, multicultural, and other services that support the broad educational mission of the University.
3. To promote ethnic, gender, and academic diversity through the recruitment and nurturing of minority students, faculty, staff, and administrators and underrepresented populations -- student and employee -- who have not traditionally come to Youngstown State University.
4. To create and implement international programming to diversity the education of students, attract international students and faculty, and serve the academic, cultural, and economic needs of the metropolitan region.
5. To market the University, its programs, and services for purposes of promoting access and diversity, expanding enrollment, and increasing University prominence at all levels: regional, state, national, and global.

Purpose 4: Research and scholarly activity.

Believing that the quality of education and public service is grounded in scholarship, Youngstown State University seeks to encourage and support research and scholarly and professional activity that strengthens its educational and service missions.

Objectives:

1. To promote and support an expanded understanding of the nature of scholarship -- an understanding both that scholarship is fundamental to the academic enterprise and that its definition is legitimately inclusive, accommodating not only pure and applied research but also scholarship related to teaching and learning and to public service.
2. To encourage scholarly activity that involves students and the expanding service region, fostering the interaction of the various dimensions of the University mission.
3. To offer increased support to faculty and others who seek external funding for their scholarship and related professional activity.
4. To sustain and enhance internal support for scholarly activity through such measures as internal grants, travel funds, library resources, research assistants, and scholarly/research assignments.

Purpose 5: Connections with the community.

Youngstown State University desires to strengthen its commitment to the greater Youngstown metropolitan community, adding new dimensions to its public service activities.

Objectives:

1. To provide leadership, knowledge, resources, services, and Activities to address the cultural, intellectual, technological, economic, and social needs of the expanding service area.
2. To clarify, support, and enhance the missions of campus units whose primary function is public service (e.g., Public Service Institute, Technology Development Corporation, University Outreach).
3. To encourage the integration of public service activity within the educational and scholarly arenas across the University.
4. To identify and pursue opportunities within the community for focused public service activity and alliances (e.g., with area schools, with local businesses and industries, with governmental agencies).

Purpose 6: Institutional environment.

Youngstown State University values collegiality and mutual respect and thus strives to build an environment that fosters productive professional relationships among individuals and groups on campus.

Objectives:

1. To recognize the inherent worth of all individuals in the University community.
2. To encourage continuing and collegial conversation within and across units and programs; and to refine and develop structures to involve all individuals in the University appropriately and collegially in decision-making processes concerning planning, priorities, and allocation of resources.
3. To enhance communication among the Divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Business and Financial Affairs as they work together to facilitate the University mission.

APPENDIX B
DEPARTMENT GOALS [Adopted March 1994]
Department of Communication and Theater
Youngstown State University

01. *To provide quality instruction in all courses.*

02. *To review periodically and revise curricular and co-curricular programs.*
    02a] Adapt instructional areas to reflect discipline-related developments.
    02b] Support a curriculum that responds to students' needs.
    02c] Evaluate the effectiveness of past summer programming to generate guidelines for future summer planning.

03. *To promote quality advisement for all students.*
    03a] Regularly evaluate existing policies and procedures for advising.
    03b] Develop brochures for entering students about the advising policies and procedures.
    03c] Develop an exit interview for graduating seniors.
    03d] Ascertain faculty interest and effectiveness in advising and design a fair and effective plan for faculty advisement assignment.

04. *To investigate and experiment with innovative teaching techniques to reflect current research, technological advances and student learning.*
    04a] Integrate appropriate technologies into courses.
    04b] Encourage faculty to attend teacher training programs.
    04c] Support faculty research on teaching.

05. *To assess faculty resources for existing courses, emphases, and degree programs to determine optimal enrollments.*
    05a] Explore possibilities for more effectively managing the scheduling and production of all the co-curricular activities in the department.

06. *To examine current recruiting and retention activities.*

07. *To seek every opportunity to meet our space and facilities needs.*
    07a] Continue to urge the meeting of contracts and deadlines, and warranties associated with the renovation of Ford Theater.
    07b] Determine, prioritize needs, and develop plans for future campus renovations.

08. *To seek every opportunity to upgrade the technology needed to support instruction and scholarship in all areas of the Department.*

09. *To explore possibilities for non-university financial contributions/support for Departmental programs, projects, and activities.*

10. *To support each area in its specialized goals.*
    10a] Speech Communication: promote a university-wide oral communication requirement.
    10b] Telecommunication: nurturing a combined enterprise with Media Services in video production/instruction.
    10c] Theater: seeking accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Theater for the BA in Speech Communication and with a Theater Emphasis and Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theater Programs.

11. *To explore "Outcomes Assessment" as it relates to our separate disciplines.*
    11a] Ask for a workshop on "Outcomes Assessment" from the Center for Teaching and Learning.
    11b] Seek information from our professional associations on "Outcomes Assessment."
    11c] Develop outcomes assessment procedures for the Department in accordance with the North Central Accreditation process's time frame.

12. *To promote the disciplines in the Department as vital to the University and larger community.*

APPENDIX C
SPEECH COMMUNICATION AREA GOALS --
ORGANIZED BY UNIVERSITY PURPOSE [Adopted March 1994]
Speech Communication Area, Department of Communication and Theater
Youngstown State University

Purpose 1: *Integrate Teaching, Scholarship, and Service*

1a. To provide quality instruction in all courses through the integration of scholarship and teaching.

1b. To review the curriculum regularly to reflect current scholarship.

Purpose 2: *Teaching and Learning*

2a. To provide quality instruction in all courses to facilitate student learning.

- 2a.1. Initiate a mentoring program for limited service faculty.
- 2a.2. Survey communication alumni regarding the utility of courses in the area.
- 2a.3. Assess the need for in-service teacher training for limited service faculty and develop programs to meet such needs.
- 2a.4. Develop peer review procedures for teaching performance.

2b. To continue developing alternative approaches to instruction.

- 2b.1. Determine appropriate opportunities for team teaching and inter-department teaching.

2c. To invite representatives from organizations outside the University to confer with our students on the connections between academic activity and the requirements of various careers.

2d. To identify and develop appropriate avenues for academic work beyond the undergraduate level.

- 2d.1. Explore the potential of certificate programs.
- 2d.2. Explore the possibility of developing an innovative Masters level program in Speech Communication.

2e. To continue to develop YSU Forensics.

- 2e.1. Seek increased funding for Forensics.
- 2e.2. Continue collegial dialogue concerning the philosophy of the YSU Forensics program.

2f. To foster means to assist students with oral communication difficulties.

- 2f.1. Develop a plan for operationalizing the Speech Improvement Lab.
- 2f.2. Seek a position for a qualified director of the Speech Improvement Lab.
- 2f.3. Identify community resources for students with communication disorders.
- 2f.4. Develop a standardized procedure within the Department for identifying and referring students with communication difficulties.

2g. To promote improved instructional communication throughout the University.

- 2g.1. Investigate speaking-across-the-curriculum programs.

2h. In conjunction with a University oral communication requirement to work with reticent students through regularly offering Speech 525.

Purpose 3: *Access and Diversity*

3a. To explore opportunities for students to meet participants in YSU's Forensics program and witness forensic events.

3b. To facilitate access to courses, programs, and activities.

Purpose 4: *Research and Scholarly Activity*

4a. To promote faculty research and publication.

4b. To work with on-campus and off-campus agencies to identify potential sponsors for worthwhile communication research.

Purpose 5: *Connections with the Community*

5a. To continue developing contacts outside the University to promote appropriate exchange of expertise.

- 5a.1. Expand the internship and practicum programs.
- 5a.2. Use experts from the community as guest speakers and resources in courses.
- 5a.3. Encourage faculty to establish university-community relationships.
- 5a.4. Identify resources for students to apply course work to community needs as class projects.
- 5a.5. Encourage alumni to share their experiences with current students.

5b. To improve contacts with educational, commercial, and governmental organizations in the community to serve the interests of our students.

Purpose 6: *Institutional Environment*

6a. To improve the coordination of scheduling with other departments offering courses required of our majors.

6b. To inform the campus community via brochures of the nature of the emphases in our area, and of the relationship between developing communication competence and careers.

6c. To establish colloquia on developments in our disciplines.

6d. To continue working with the School of Education and relevant departments concerning certification programs.

6e. To continue to promote public debates on campus.

6f. To work in a consultative fashion with and/or provide workshops for the Center for Teaching and Learning.

6g. To continue to promote communication between the Department and other departments currently requiring speech communication courses, especially periodic review of course goals and objectives.

6h. To consult with each department to identify what speech communication courses would appropriately serve its majors.

APPENDIX D
STUDENT OUTCOMES
BACHELORS DEGREE IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION [Adopted May 1995]
Department of Communication and Theater
Youngstown State University

I. *Students should be able to demonstrate the verbal and nonverbal skills, knowledge, and abilities to communicate competently in a variety of communication situations.*

A. Students should be able to prepare and delivery effective presentations.
   1. Students should be able to develop a clear speaking purpose.
   2. Students should be able to develop and narrow a speaking topic.
   3. Students should be able to locate, organize and evaluate information to meet the specific demands of the audience and communication situation.
   4. Students should be able to begin and end a presentation effectively..
   5. Students should be able to develop and use visual aids in presentations.
   6. Students should be able to relate their presentation to their audience.

B. Students should be able to listen skillfully.
   1. Students should be able to employ listening proficiencies which foster message recall.
   2. Students should be able to discern and understand content and relational aspects of communication.
   3. Students should be able to demonstrate to others that they are listening to them and provide appropriate feedback.

C. Students should be able to communicate competently with people from different cultures and diverse backgrounds.
   1. Students should have developed the cognitive ability to comprehend the elements and dynamics of a communication event with minimal understanding.
   2. Students should be able to display respect and tolerance for persons of different cultures and backgrounds.
   3. Students should be able to respond in a non-judgmental manner to people of different cultures and backgrounds.
   4. Students should be able to appreciate each individual's uniqueness within their own culture.
   5. Students should be able to communicate with an empathic understanding with people from different cultures and backgrounds.
   6. Students should have developed both problem-solving and relationship building strategies in their interactions with people of diverse backgrounds.

D. Students should be able to communicate competently in a variety of one-to-one situations.
   1. Students should be able to communicate competently in selecting, information gathering, and persuasive interview situations as an interviewer and interviewee.
   2. Students should be able to identify and use the stages of developing, maintaining, and terminating one-to-one relationships.
   3. Students should be able to self-disclose appropriate information in their one-to-one relationships.

E. Students should be able to communicate competently in group communication situations.
   1. Students should be able to provide leadership in groups.
      a. Students should know and practice various ways of making decisions and solving problems in groups.
   2. Students should be able to participate effectively in groups.
      a. Students should know and practice the different roles required in groups.
   3. Students should have an understanding of the principles of negotiation.

F. Students should understand organizational communication and how to communicate competently in an organizational setting.
   1. Students should understand the evolution of different organizational theories from a communication perspective.
   2. Students should understand how organizational structures affect communication and vice versa.
   3. Students should understand formal and informal networks.
   4. Students should understand the ethics of organizational communication.
   5. Students should understand and be able to express the manifestation of organizational cultures.
   6. Students should understand and be able to identify the potential influence organizational cultures have on organizations.

II. *Students should be able to gather, synthesize and use qualitative and quantitative information to enhance communication.*
   A. Students should be able to use current communication technologies.
   B. Students should be prepared to user future communication technologies.
   C. Students should be able to read, understand, and evaluate qualitative and quantitative communication research.
   D. Students should be familiar with appropriate research strategies helpful to inquiry and exploration of a question or issue.

III. *Students should have a sense of culturally established ethics as they prepare to communicate, delivery their messages, and receive communication from others.*

A. Students should be able to communicate ethically.
B. Students should be able to construct effective and ethical arguments.
C. Students should be rhetorically sensitive in their communication with others.

IV. *Students should be able to think critically as they prepare to communicate, deliver their messages, and receive communication from others.*

A. Students should be able to make appropriate logical inferences based on a body of information.
    1. Students should understand and demonstrate the processes of inductive and deductive reasoning.
    2. Students should be able to identify and analyze common fallacies of argument.
    3. Students should be able to recognize and evaluate common forms of reasoning.
B. Students should be able to listen and speak critically and demonstrate logical command of subject matter.
C. Students should be able to identify and weigh the quantity and quality of evidence which supports a proposition or claim.

V. *Students should be able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the history and current status of the communication discipline.*

A. Students should be able to summarize the evolution of different theories of communication and rhetoric from ancient Greece to modern times. Students should be able to identify the influences of historic views of communication on contemporary understandings of the communication process.
    1. Interpersonal communication
    2. Intercultural communication
    3. Group communication
    4. Organizational communication
    5. Public communication
    6. Listening
B. Students should be able to identify and explain the different approaches of various models of the communication process.
C. Students should be able to summarize the origins and major developments of different areas in the communication discipline.